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ABSTRACT

The application of the principles of intramural athletic competition to stimulate outstanding academic performance is discussed in this paper. The implementation of an academic intramural competition based on student diversity, immediate recognition, fun, and meaningful prizes in a Texas high school is described. The program is based on the tenet that student motivation for learning must be recognized and rewarded. The first year of the competition was successful in generating competitive student participation in academic achievement, community involvement, acknowledgement, and student motivation. (LMI)

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ACADEMIC INTRAMURALS: The Thrill of Victory--The Excitement of Competition

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ACADEMIC INTRAMURALS

"The Thrill of Victory the Excitement of Competition"

By Arthur C. Casey

The Board of Trustees of the Coleman Independent School District recently spent a great deal of time and effort to develop a set of long range goals for the school district. Among those goals was one which stated, "that each student would be encouraged to reach his full educational potential". The school administration and the teaching staff began immediately to seek ways to implement this stated goal. Coleman I.S.D. has for the past year employed a number of traditional approaches to encourage students to reach their full potential. However, in this article we will address a rather unique approach to an old problem, "getting students excited about academic achievement".

Philosophically, we have taken the stance that if our students are going to compete with the rest of the world academically, then they must first learn to compete with each other. There has been a great deal written both pro and con about the value of athletics. However, without regard to one's stance on the value of the extra-

curricular program, it is an undeniable fact that students in Texas are among the most proficient athletes in this country or the world. Why? Because they are excited about athletics. The question then becomes...Is there a way that we can use what we have learned from athletic competition to the benefit of the academic program? Many school districts have addressed this idea in a number of positive ways i.e. academic letter jackets, academic awards ceremonies, bumper stickers, etc. Although they are positive, these practices miss the essence of the real reasons that athletes are willing to put so much effort, practice time, and sweat into the pursuit of excellence in sports. Athletes do not compete for letter jackets, sports banquets or the right to place bumper stickers on their cars. They commit their efforts because they seek the immediately gratification that comes from recognition by peers and by communities. They covet the "high" that is associated with the thrill of head to head competition, the blast of adrenaline that comes with a great catch or a three point shot at the buzzer and ultimately the thrill of victory. Every Friday night in September and October fans all over

this state will come to their feet in cheers and applause for athletic accomplishment.

Academic competitions may never draw a crowd of 5,000 cheering fans. We would suggest, however, that we should strive to achieve that kind of immediate recognition and gratification for outstanding academic performances. In an attempt to do just that, the board, administration, and the teaching staff at Coleman High School began the development of an academic intramural competition. A committee of teachers and administrators at the direction of the board established a format and the rules for the competition. The competition was based on the following assumptions:

1. The competition should involve a wide range of students.
2. The competition should provide immediate recognition.
3. The competition should be fun and exciting for spectators and participants.
4. The prizes would be meaningful to the student population.

With these assumptions in mind, the committee began the task of putting the program into effect. The competition was a team event.

Each team consisted of one A student, one B student, and one C student. The event was planned to occur during the school day with all non-participating students in attendance. The community was encouraged to attend, and the local and area new media were invited to cover the event. The audience participated by cheering for their favorite team. First prize was an all expense paid trip to South Padre Island during the spring break for all the members of the winning team and sponsor of their choice (approved by parents). The trip included air fare, a rented car, lodging, guided fishing trip, and expense money. Second and third prizes were cash awards of $75.00 and $50.00 for each member of the team.

The gym floor was set up with chairs and score boards. A teacher sat between a pair of competitors. One competitor from each team was on the floor at a time. Questions were flashed by an overhead projector onto a screen and read by the contest director. All questions were multiple choice, and the competitors had 15 seconds to answer the questions on a standardized score sheet.

The answers were graded immediately by the teacher seated between each pair of contestants. The scores were recorded by the teachers on score boards behind each team's chairs. This process created a running score for each team. The team members and the audience knew immediately if the contestant had given the correct response.

The contest consisted of 4 rounds, each team member answered 5 questions per round, and a total of sixty questions were used. The questions were generated by the high school staff. Each academic staff member was asked to submit 40 questions drawn from his/her curricular area. From this body of questions, an independent committee selected the questions that were used in the competition.

The academic intramurals program at Coleman High School was extremely successful. The first year sixteen teams competed, a total of 48 students, approximately twenty-one per cent of the student body. Both competitors and spectators enjoyed the competition. We plan to continue this contest, and from the comments of the students, we expect a significant increase in the level of participation next year. Most importantly, for one day at Coleman High School academics were exciting, competitive, loudly applauded, and immediately rewarding!